

Amendments to the Abstract

Please replace the existing abstract with the revised abstract below wherein underlining indicates additions and strikethrough and double bracketing indicates deletions.

The laser has a focusing system including a housing (2) with opposing transparent windows (4,5) between which imaging optics (3) are positioned. The housing (2) also has an inlet (7) for the introduction of pressurised gas into the cavity of the housing. The imaging optics (3) include refractive/reflective lens elements (8,9) and a phase-only filter (10). The filter (10) has different regions each assigned a particular phase-shift and may be implemented in the pixels of a spatial light modulator or using a fused silica structure that has regions etched to differing depths to achieve differing phase delays ~~by means of the remaining thickness of the silica at each of the regions~~. The filter (10) ensures that the laser beam incident on a workpiece that is to be cut, for example, has an intensity distribution which extends beyond the focussed spot in at least one dimension. With this laser high precision as well as high speed cutting or welding can be performed using an optimized light distribution.